

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 IGA-02 EB-08 ORM-02 DHA-02 /075 W
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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8332
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE KUALA LUMPUR 5043

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, MY
SUBJECT: HARRIS WINS PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION IN SABAH

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 5004; (B) KUALA LUMPUR 3429

1. SABAH CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARRIS SALLEH WON A PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION FOR THE SABAH CONSTITUENCY OF KENINGAU IN POLLING CONDUCTED OVER A SIX-DAY PERIOD ENDING JULY 30. HE DEFEATED HIS ONLY OPPONENT, INDEPENDENT FORMER POLICEMAN BETTIE BASINAU, BY 8,410 TO 2,451 VOTES.

2. IN THE SPRIT OF RECENT SABAH POLITICS, THIS ELECTION TURNED INTO A VITUPERATIVE CONTEST BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONAL FRONT (NF) PARTIES IN THE STATE, HARRIS' BERJAYA AND THE STATE OPPOSITION UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (USNO). SOON AFTER THE RESIGNATION OF THE INCUMBENT ROBERT EVANS (PARA 6 REFTTEL B) TO MAKE WAY FOR HARRIS' ELECTION, USNO BEGAN AGITATING IN ITS KINABALU SABAH TIMES FOR THE SELECTION OF AN USNO MAN AS

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THE NF-ENDORSED CANDIDATE IN SPITE OF HARRIS' DECLARED INTENTION TO RUN. WHEN THAT PLOY FAILED AFTER A LITTLE PRE-EMPTION ON HARRIS' PART (HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS PM DATUK HUSSEIN'S CHOICE AS NF CANDIDATE BEFORE KUALA LUMPUR HAD A CHANCE TO DO SO), USNO BEGAN BACKING THE INDEPENDENT IN THE SAME WAY THAT BERJAYA HAD BACKED AN INDEPENDENT AGAINST AN USNO/NF MAN IN KIMANIS EARLIER THIS YEAR. BERJAYA

MANAGED TO ARRANGE FOR BOTH THE INDEPENDENT'S BROTHER AND ONE OF HIS SECONDS TO DECLARE THEIR SUPPORT FOR HARRIS BEFORE THE ELECTION WAS OVER.

3. COMMENT. THE KENINGAU BY-ELECTION SHOWS THAT SABAH (AND MALAYSIA) IS NO CLOSER TO RESOLVING THE CONTRADICTION IN HAVING TWO NF PARTIES IN OPPOSITION TO EACH OTHER ON THE STATE LEVEL. IT IS CLEAR, THOUGH, THAT HARRIS' PERSONAL POSITION IS STRENGTHENED BY HIS ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT, WHERE HE NOW JOINS THE CHIEF MINISTERS OF PENANG AND SARAWAK. FURTHERMORE, A RESOLUTION OF THE PHILIPPINE CLAIM TO SABAH, AS WIDELY SPECULATED (REF A), MIGHT ALSO SERVE TO INCREASE HIS POPULARITY AND CONSOLIDATE HIS HOLD OVER THE SABAH GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH FORMER CHIEF MINISTER TUN MUSTAPHA COULD TRY TO USE THE ARGUMENTS PUT FORTH BY TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN (REF A) THAT HARRIS HAS EXCEEDED HIS AUTHORITY AND SOLD OUT THE PHILIPPINE MUSLIMS BY HIS DEALINGS WITH THE GOP TO ERODE SUPPORT FOR HARRIS AMONG SABAH'S MUSLIMS.
MILLER

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